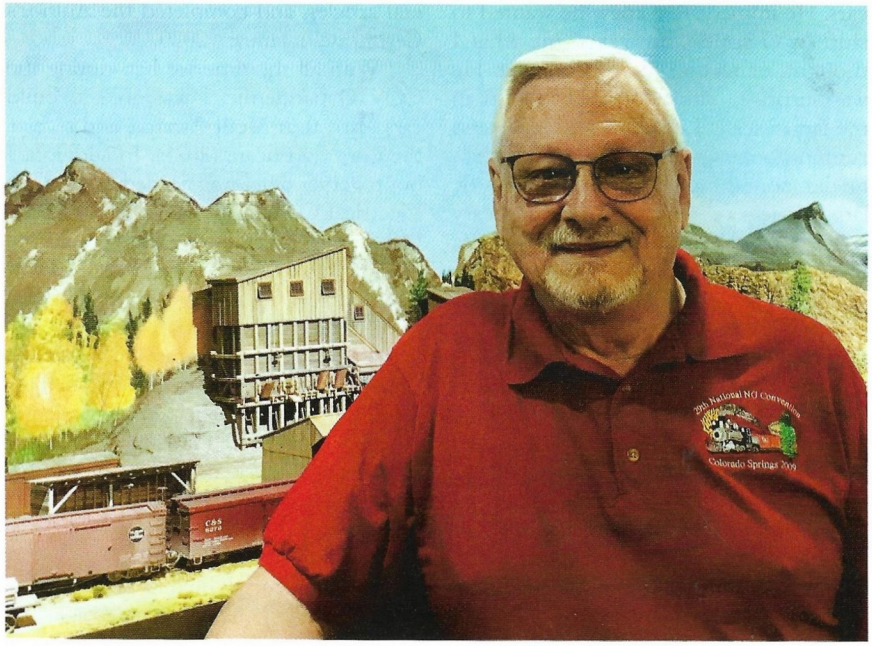
KEITH STAMPER

EARNS

MASTER MODEL RAILROADER® #767



My interest and passion for trains began when I was about 12 years old and living in what was then Southern Rhodesia. In 1954, my family immigrated to Southern Rhodesia from South Africa, where my father began working for the Rhodesia Railways. He was a master coach builder.

My exposure to steam locomotives gave me an appreciation for the technology of boiling water and turning it into motion. I would often visit the local station in the city, watch the giant Garratt locomotives working the yard, and see one of my father's friends (an engineer). Cab rides were offered, and I spent many a happy Saturday afternoon riding in the cab of a Garratt.

My first layout was built on a 4x8 sheet of plywood in my bedroom and consisted of Hornby Dublo British trains. In 1963, my family relocated back to South Africa, and my train layout was sold to a school friend. I had to settle for model train magazines for a few years. I was 13.

I began modeling in N-scale when a visit to the local hobby shop rekindled my interest in trains and models. At about age 17, I built a small N-scale layout that fit under my bed in my parents' home. This layout kept me occupied for several years. Then, for a few years, high school, college, fast cars, and girls got in the way of the hobby.

I married in 1974 and became a serious model railroader when I discovered narrow gauge and saw photos of Denver & Rio Grande K36 and K37 models in HOn3 on the back of *Model Railroader* magazine. Narrow gauge soon caught my attention.

I started a small HOn3 layout, and my love for the Colorado narrow gauge and fascination with all the three-foot gauge railroads grew. Modeling in HOn3 halfway around the world was a huge challenge. I did a lot of scratchbuilding since so little was available. The local model railroad group was intrigued by HOn3, although many had never seen nor heard of the scale and prototype. I was a lone wolf amidst the standard gauge modelers.

As a technologist, I could accomplish most things electrical and mechanical, and building a model railroad was a great way to enjoy the hobby. My HOn3 empire grew to fill a single-car garage.

In 1983, I was transferred from South Africa to Canada and began a new life living in the Toronto area. I first saw an On3 D&RGW layout at a friend's home, and the larger scale caught my attention. Not long after seeing the On3 layout, I headed to the local hobby shop, traded my entire HOn3 brass locomotive collection, and came home with On3 models. I began building car kits and painted the brass locomotives I had acquired. PFM sound was also available, and I purchased a PFM SS for my new On3 locomotives.

Living in the Toronto area allowed me to join a narrow gauge group. I met several modelers and attended monthly meetings held at members' homes.

In 1985, I and three members of the narrow gauge group attended the Mid-Atlantic Module Meet held in the Howard County Fairgrounds near Baltimore—the start of my 34-year attendance at the narrow gauge module meets. Our group, consisting of Gerry Cornwell, Al Collins, and Harold Midwood, built an On3 module and participated by traveling from Toronto to the venue and enjoying a weekend of narrow-gauge camaraderie.

One year, when we arrived at the meeting to set up our modules, one of the local fellows nicknamed us the "Maple Leaf Mafia": we became known as the MLM. I fondly remember the yearly trips to the Mid-Atlantic narrow gauge module meets. They were the best of times.

I learned the skill of brass locomotive construction from a local Toronto modeler, the late Harold Midwood. A dedicated and skilled craftsperson who loved the On3 Kodama K27 locomotives, Harold taught me how to make these exquisite models operate and run well on a layout. Harold and I developed a friendship that lasted until his passing in 2001.

My longtime tenure in the hobby has allowed me to acquire many skills. I enjoy working on all aspects of the hobby, whether it be building benchwork, hand-laying track, or installing Power on Board with DCC decoders.

In 1994, another job transfer moved my family and me to the Chicago area, and I was fortunate to meet a group of narrow gauge modelers: the Midwest Narrow Gauge Circle. I soon began attending monthly meetings with yet another great group of modelers. I lived in Kenosha, Wisconsin, and purchasing a home there meant a new On3 layout, as the previous layout in Toronto had become part of other MLM members' layouts.

Five years later, I transferred again to the Dallas, Texas, area and met the late Gary Rush and Marc LaChey, MMR 725. After gathering at a local hobby shop,

Gary, Marc, and I decided to build a sectional Sn3 layout and show it at local train shows. Soon, other modelers joined in, and we would meet on a Saturday morning at Gary's art studio — the perfect place to build a layout. We traveled to several train shows to exhibit our Sn3 modular layout, including a few narrow gauge conventions.

I decided to leave Texas and return to Toronto to be near family. I retained my large collection of On3 equipment and built a layout in the basement of our home.

Looming retirement in 2016 led to moving to a new home in a smaller city — just far enough away from the hustle and bustle of Toronto. We searched for a home with a suitable basement and discovered a ranch-style home with a large train room that would allow for my final layout. I had 42x12-foot, 6-inch of dedicated space.

This layout was to be On3 and allow for point-to-point operation. My skills as a food packaging production line designer allowed for the use of CAD, and track plans were soon prepared for the new layout. Work began on the layout in April 2016, the day after I returned from the office and retirement began.

The layout took shape very quickly. With all benchwork in place and the track plan at hand, I began hand-laying my track. In 2014, I decided to go to Power on Board with radio control. Thus, the layout would be built with zero requirements for track power. All turnouts were built in place without the use of any templates.

From early 2016, when layout construction commenced, and work had reached a point where most of the scenery was completed, and the trains were running, I began hosting operating sessions for various members of the MLM.

In May 2022, Marc LaChey (MMR 725) encouraged me to enter the NMRA Achievement Program, and I decided to proceed. I had hesitated to begin the AP as my career kept me very busy, and I was unsure of the time I would have to devote to working on my MMR. Now I had time.

As I had a well-established layout, it was time to apply for my first AP Certificates, Scenery and Civil Engineering.

Niagara Frontier Division AP Manager Ron Tuff (MMR 366) visited my home along with other NMRA members to evaluate my work, and thus, I earned my Scenery and Civil Engineering Certificates in September 2022. I was encouraged to continue now that I had accomplished two of the seven required certificates. Ron was most helpful and encouraged me to become a better model builder. Realizing that building to the best of my ability was something that really made me think that completing every aspect of the process should be better and not just "good enough."

My next challenge was to earn my Cars Certificate, and I built cars, three of which were scratchbuilt as per the NMRA requirements. I scratchbuilt a combine and hi-side gondolas, all in On3 scale. My combine required me to form a clerestory roof, and fellow narrow gauge modeler Dave Adams kindly helped with his photos on how to build a vacuum box. Using my vacuum box, I formed the required components for the roof. An evaluation followed, and I earned my Cars Certificate.

Motive Power followed. I decided to build a brass locomotive kit in 2019 and purchased a Backwoods Miniatures Garratt kit. The incentive to earn my Motive Power Certificate encouraged me to work on the Garratt locomotive kit again, which had languished for a while. Building the Garratt brought back memories of those long-past years as a boy in Africa. I decided the Garratt would become one of the three locomotives required to earn my Master Builder Motive Power. The brass model Garratt earned a merit award, as did my scratchbuilt Mack Railbus and the Rio Grande Southern Galloping Goose brass kit. All these models were built to On3 scale.

I was fortunate to have an article describing Power on Board published in the November 2023 issue of *Railroad Model Craftsman* and a few articles on various topics in NMRA local magazines, such as "How to Paint a Brass Locomotive." Most recently, the January/February 2024 *Narrow Gauge and Short Line Gazette* featured my layout. I also presented a few clinics at various Niagara Frontier Region's International Division gatherings. I earned my Author Certificate.

Next came my Dispatchers Certificate, earned by participating and hosting operating sessions on my home layout, The Colorado & Rio Grande Southern Rwy, along with other narrow gauge layouts in the Maple Leaf Modelers group. I am also a HOMES (HO Model Engineers Society) HO club member. We hold op sessions once a month. Besides running trains as either a brakeman or engineer, I had the opportunity to learn the dispatcher role. I found operating on the HOMES club layout to be challenging, and I learned a lot about prototypical train operations.

My Electrical Certificate was based on layout work and hands-on demonstrations with guidance from Ron Tuff (MMR 366), NFR AP manager. My work in the technology field afforded me the opportunity to apply my electrical skills to satisfy the AP Electrical requirements.

As a member of the NFR International Division, I look forward to every opportunity to give back and serve in some way. Ron Tuff helped and encouraged me as I journeyed through the Achievement Program. I want to thank Ron for his advice and encouragement, for which I am truly grateful.

I also owe a debt of thanks to my longtime friend, Marc LaChey, who encouraged and mentored me along the way with advice on how to best accomplish my goals. Marc and I have traveled to Colorado and spent many happy times at Durango & Silverton or Cumbres & Toltec. We try to attend the National Narrow Gauge Conventions together most years, and I have been fortunate to have been present at more than 23 since arriving in Canada in 1983.

Working on my MMR has been a rewarding endeavor. As I approach my 75th year, the MMR program is the culmination of my lifelong passion for model trains and the hobby.

Participation in the NMRA and the Achievement Program has taught me many things. Am I a better modeler because of my participation? I would answer with a resounding yes! I intend to engage in the hobby for as long as possible and hope to help and encourage other modelers to join the NMRA and participate in the AP.

My wife Claire has always encouraged my model railroading activities and supported me while I worked many hours on projects to earn various certificates. I am most grateful to Claire.

Certificates Earned
Keith Stamper, MMR® #767

Master Builder – Scenery
Model Railroad Engineer – Civil
Master Builder – Cars
Master Builder – Motive Power
Model Railroad Author
Chief Dispatcher
Model Railroad Engineer – Electrical